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TRUMP TRIES TO SUE THE TRUTH AND MUZZLE THE FACTS ABOUT RUSSIA

President Donald Trump is suing *The New York Times* for libel in an effort to rewrite history around his collusion with Russia in 2016. Engaging in frivolous lawsuits has long been one of Trump's favorite tactics—and it's also a favorite tactic of oligarchs around the world, including in Russia.

The Trump lawsuit claims that a March 27, 2019, op-ed titled "The Real Trump-Russia Quid Pro Quo" intentionally lied about Trump to hurt his 2020 campaign. According to a draft legal complaint, Trump's 2020 campaign is suing over author Max Frankel's claim that "the Trump campaign and [Russian President] Vladimir Putin's oligarchy ... had an overarching deal: the quid of help in the campaign against Hillary Clinton for the quo of a new pro-Russian foreign policy, starting with relief from the Obama administration's burdensome economic sanctions. The Trumpites knew about the quid and held out the prospect of the quo."

There's one huge problem with Trump's lawsuit: What Frankel wrote in his op-ed is true.

The Trump campaign knew full well that Russia was helping them win the 2016 election.

- Trump campaign adviser George Papadopoulos knew months in advance that Russia intended to anonymously release emails stolen from the Clinton campaign in an effort to boost Trump's candidacy.
- The Trump campaign's response was to create multiple back channels to people linked to Russia's attacks, including WikiLeaks, which was disseminating the emails, and alleged Russian intelligence operative Konstantin Kilimnik, with whom Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort shared internal polling data and campaign strategy.
- Donald Trump Jr., Jared Kushner, and Manafort took the June 9 meeting in Trump Tower with emissaries of a Russian oligarch on the explicit understanding that it was "part of Russia and its government's support for Mr. Trump."
- The intelligence community reportedly warned the Trump campaign on August 17, 2016, that "foreign adversaries, including Russia," were attempting to interfere in American democracy and that they should "alert the FBI about any suspicious overtures to their campaign."
- *For a full breakdown of what the Trump campaign knew about Russia's efforts to assist Trump's campaign, see 'Aiding and Abetting: What the Trump Campaign Knew About*

Russia's Attack."

The Trump campaign advocated a shockingly pro-Russia foreign policy.

- Trump ran on an explicitly pro-Putin platform, routinely bringing up his desire to "get along" with Putin, comparing Putin favorably to President Barack Obama, and defending Putin against charges that his regime assassinates journalists and dissidents.
- In a major foreign policy speech in April 2016, which was hosted by a think tank with close ties to Russia, Trump said that he would prioritize "seek[ing] common ground" with Russia "based on shared interests," promising to try to increase cooperation between the United States and Russia.
- The Trump campaign intervened to soften language in the 2016 Republican platform about arming Ukraine against Russian aggression in Crimea and Donbass.
- Trump repeatedly criticized sanctions on Russia and suggested that he would consider recognizing Russia's illegal efforts to annex Crimea as legitimate.

After the election, Trump tried to deliver on his promises of a pro-Russia foreign policy.

- Within hours of the Obama administration announcing sanctions to punish Russia for interfering in the 2016 election, Trump's first national security adviser, Mike Flynn, proceeded to conspire with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak to undermine the rollout.
- Upon taking office, the Trump administration reportedly tried to relieve sanctions on Russia, only failing to do so because of public pressure and revelations about collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin.
- When Congress forced Trump's hand by voting almost unanimously to sanction Russia for its 2016 attacks on American democracy, Trump released a statement criticizing the bill as "seriously flawed" and leveled accusations that it was unconstitutional.
- The administration has done everything in its power to undermine the rollout of those sanctions, including blowing off deadlines to enact the punishments, dismissing the need for further sanctions, and even lifting sanctions on key Putin-aligned oligarchs without properly notifying Congress.
- *For a full list of how Trump has delivered on Putin's goals, see "Putin's Payout: 12 Ways Trump Has Supported Putin's Foreign Policy Agenda."*

Shielding himself from the truth with frivolous lawsuits has long been one of Trump's favorite tactics.

- It's what he tried to do when, unable to pay back millions of dollars in loans from Deutsche Bank, he sued the bank, alleging it had caused the 2008 financial crisis and made him unable to repay.
- He's spent decades filing frivolous libel lawsuits, including against an architecture critic and comedian Bill Maher for criticizing his buildings and mocking his "birther" crusade, respectively. (The former case was dismissed, and Trump ultimately withdrew the latter.)
- He's also threatened to sue those who come forward with evidence of his wrongdoing, including special counsel Robert Mueller and women who have accused him of sexual misconduct, and he even suggested changing libel laws to make it easier to sue his critics.

- This is also a favorite tactic of oligarchs around the world, including in Russia, where tycoons such as Dmitry Firtash and Oleg Deripaska are infamous for filing frivolous libel and defamation lawsuits to prevent the press from reporting on their wrongdoing.

Of course, the Trump campaign's lawsuit is laughable for many reasons: It conflates op-eds and reporting; significantly overstates what Frankel actually alleged; and suggests that Frankel knew that what he was writing was wrong because of the Mueller report, which didn't come out until almost a month later. But the goal of such behavior is as sinister and serious as ever; it's part of Trump's sustained effort to discredit the Mueller report and mischaracterize its actual conclusions about the campaign's collusion with Russia as well as to punish anybody who dares to accurately describe Trump's lawless behavior.